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16 September 1966

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(N)

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Minutes of the Meeting of the 303 Committee,  
15 September 1966

PRESENT: Mr. Rostow, Ambassador Johnson, Mr. Vance, and Mr. Helms

Dr. Albert Wheelon, Colonel Paul N. Bacalis, and

[redacted] were also present

OX CART Reconnaissance of Cuba (BYE 2674-66).

1. On the proposal to exercise the capability of OXCART over Cuba, the committee emerged with attitudes more negative than positive. It was agreed that Mr. Vance would submit a statement giving the position of the Secretary of Defense and Ambassador Johnson would obtain the same from Secretary Rusk. It was emphasized that both Secretaries, when polled earlier, had not been noticeably negative to the proposal. The Executive Secretary would prepare a summary for higher authority.

2. Mr. Vance asked for an estimate of possible compromise to the Soviets by use of the system over Cuba. Dr. Wheelon felt that use of OXCART over Cuba would give an indication of altitude, speed and perhaps turning radius. Radar tracking could provide some cross sections leading to measurement of the vehicle and, depending on which jamming systems were employed, some indication of jamming capabilities.

3. Ambassador Johnson observed that if the Cubans do not activate their SA-2's, the proof of capability might not be determined. He then asked how desirable higher resolution photography was at this time for the Cuban target. Mr. Helms replied that this was hard to determine precisely. Ambassador Johnson also surmised that by exposing the equipment in this theatre our capability might be decreased by the ensuing knowledge in the hands of an enemy.

4. On the question of how the Soviets might interpret this "escalation" in the Caribbean, Mr. Rostow believed that it would hardly be considered a decisive signal. Mr. Rostow, in examining certain possible results, such as alerting the North Vietnamese to a new system, put the problem in the context of "is this trip necessary?"

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5. Dr. Wheelon felt that certain advantages would accrue from becoming semioperational. The reliability of the equipment could be established in realistic terms. Routine exercise of the system would put the Soviets on notice as to our increased capability.

6. Ambassador Johnson reiterated that he felt slightly uneasy about using OXCART unless an overriding requirement could be presented. Mr. Rostow felt that introduction of OXCART over Cuba might induce the Soviets also to introduce more sophisticated equipment. The conclusion seemed to be that producing ripples in the existing calm was not desirable. Mr. Vance concluded that he would prefer not to give up our surprise element at this time.

(signed)

Distribution

Ambassador Johnson  
Mr. Vance  
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